

Questions Asked Amy Coles That Were Not Answered in the Zoom Q & A

Laity, AWF Do you believe that sexual relations outside of marriage constitute sinful behavior?

Answer: I do believe that for those who are married, sex outside of marriage constitutes sinful behavior. As a United Methodist clergy, I have made a commitment to celibacy and singleness and fidelity in marriage.

Laity, AWF Do you agree with the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade?

Answer: I support our Social Principles regarding abortion which state that “the beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence, ... and we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child.... Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, family, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel.” (§ 161 K, 2016 *Book of Discipline*)

As Christians, I believe that we are called to protect the rights of women to make their own reproductive health decisions and to reduce the number of abortions by increasing access to healthcare and support for mothers (and fathers) to care for their children. This support should come not only from our government but also from the church. I am concerned that the protection offered women for almost 50 years which allowed them to make decisions about their reproductive health through Roe v. Wade is now in the hands of individual states to determine.

Lay, FL In what ways has the institution of the UMC caused injustice and harm? As a UMC bishop, what would you do to resist evil, injustice, and oppression?

Answer: Even though we pledge “resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves” in our baptismal vows, we continue live in a world in which we do not value all persons equally. The institution of the Central Conference is one example of how The Methodist Church perpetuated systemic racism. It took until 1956 for women to be granted full clergy rights. Currently, we single out “the practice of homosexuality” as incompatible with Christian teaching in our book of Discipline and refuse marriage and ordination for our LGBTQIA+ brothers and sisters.

Our Wesleyan understanding of holiness of heart and life would lead me as a bishop to address both our individual attitudes and practices as well as the systems which perpetuate these injustices. I appreciate that Bishop Ken Carter reminds us that anti-racism is a practice of discipleship and sanctification. Therefore, this work should be a part of our journey towards Christlikeness, both individually and corporately.

Lay, AWF Do you believe that it is important that the United States to the well-being of the world that the United States is the most powerful county, both economically and militarily

Answer: I am thankful to live in a county in which we can practice religion freely, and in the Church, we focus on the Kingdom of God. As a Christian, I have committed my life to making our world look more like God's Kingdom. Power and domination, both economically and militarily are antithetical to Jesus' teachings. Rather, our focus is to be on the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of all. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40 NRSV)

Lay, AWF Give one specific, concrete example of racism within the UMC and one specific, concrete example of racism outside of our church.

Answer: A local church SPRC which says to the District Superintendent, "we are not ready for a Black pastor."

There are so many, but the one I witnessed today was the racial profiling of an African American male youth when he was shopping, evidenced by a clerk follow him around the store.

Lay, AWF What are the problems that keep the UMC from being a fully anti-racists church?

Answer: Sin. Systems which perpetuate injustice. Individual attitudes and behaviors which distinguish races as inferior or superior to one another. An unwillingness to discuss white supremacy and how it's manifested in our churches and culture.

Lay, HOL Given the punitive actions taken against Traditional believers over the last few years, how can one justify that there is a place for these under the big Umbrella being pushed now for the future?

Answer: I fully understand that perception is reality. At the same time, I have not witnessed punitive actions taken against Traditional believers in the Western North Carolina Conference over the past few years. Conversely, we have talked about the continuing UMC being a place for all persons. Our Bishop and Cabinet have developed an "Expanded Profile" which lets a church request a pastor who embraces a stance of traditional convictions. It is my hope that The United Methodist Church will be a place for all those who can be a part of a church where we agree on our core doctrines while perhaps disagreeing on our interpretation of scriptures related to human sexuality and other ways that we are called to live out the Gospel.

Lay, WNC How do you see the work you have done with the Connectional Table to grow and learn new aspects of the church? How have you learned from that experience?

Answer: I have learned much about the mission and vision of our global denomination through my participation on the Connectional Table. Not only have I had the opportunity to hear first-hand about the celebrations and challenges in our Central and Jurisdictional Conferences, but I have also learned how our General Agencies are seeking to support the ministries of annual conferences and local churches. Through participation on the budget allocations team, I have been a part of proposing how we might steward our financial resources to the World Service Fund, the Interdenominational Cooperation Fund, Africa University the Black College Fund, and the Ministerial Education Fund, based upon the values rather than maintaining the status quo of how the budget has been proportionally divided over the past several quadrennia.

Lay, AWF Since you apparently do not believe in a historical Adam and Eve, do you believe that God's original plan was to use the process of evolution to create, a process, which, by its very nature, creates through death, destruction and disease.

Lay, AWF Do you believe in macroevolution?

Answer: I will answer these questions together. This past week, Dean Edgardo Colón-Emeric from Duke Divinity School stated that "without dialogue, we die." Both above questions point to the benefit of dialogue around biblical interpretation and understanding of the creation stories in Bible study, Sunday School classes, and/or small groups. As I shared in my Zoom Q & A, some of what I glean from the opening chapter of Genesis are:

- God created all things
- There was an orderliness to Creation
- God created human beings in the image of God
- Creation as intended include human beings having harmony with God, self, others, and creation
- God gave human beings freedom with limits
- When human being rebelled against those limitations, harmony was disrupted.